MAGAZINE SECTION

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FRAN

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CHAPTER I.

A Knock at the Door.

FRAN knocked at the front door. It was too dark for her to find the bell; however, had she found it, she would have knocked just the same.

At first, no one answered. That was not surprising, since everybody was supposed to be at the Union Camp-meeting that had been advertised for the last two months. Of course, it was not beyond possibility that some one might have stayed at home to invite his soul instead of getting it saved; but that any one in Littleburg should go visiting at half-past eight, and especially that any one should come knocking at the door of this particular house was almost incredible.

No doubt that is why the young woman who finally opened the door—after Fran had subjected it to a second and more prolonged visitation of her small fist—looked at the stranger with surprise, which was, in itself, reproof. Standing in the dim light that reached the porch from the hall, Fran's appearance was not above suspicion. She looked very dark, sharp-faced, and small. Her attitude suggested one who wanted something and had come to ask for it. The lady in the doorway believed herself confronted by a "camper"—one of those fitting birds of outer darkness who have no religion of their own, but who are always putting that of others to the proof.

The voice from the doorway was cool, impersonal, as if, by its very aloofness, it would push the wanderer away: "What do you want?"

"I want Hamilton Gregory," Fran answered promptly, without the slightest trace of embarra-sment. "I'm told he lives here."

"Mr. Gregory"—offering the name with its title as a palpable rebuke—"lives here, but is not at home. What do you want, little girl?"

"Where is he?" Fran asked, undaunted.

At first the young woman was tempted to close the door upon the impudent gaze that never faltered in watching her, but those bright unwavering eyes, gleaming out of the gloom of straw hat and over-shadowing hair, compelled recognition of some sort.

"He is at the camp meeting," she answered reluctantly, irritated at opposition, and displeased with herself for being irritated. "What do you want with him? I will attend to whatever it is. I am acquainted with all of his affairs—I am his secretary."

"Where is that camp meeting? How can I find the place?" was Fran's quick reioinder. She could not explain the dislike rising within her. She was too young herself, to consider the other's youth an advantage, but the beauty of the imperious woman in the doorway—why did it not stir her admiration?

Mr. Gregory's secretary reflected that, despite its seeming improbability, it might be important for him to see this queer creature who came to strange doors at night time.

"If you will go straight down that road"—she pointed—"and keep on for about a mile and a half, you will come to the big tent. Mr. Gregory will be in the tent, leading the choir."

"All right." And turning her back on the door, Fran swiftly gained the front steps. Half way down, she paused, and glanced over her thin shoulder. Standing thus, nothing was to be seen of her but a blurred outline, and the shining of her eyes.

"I guess," said Fran inscrutably, "you're not Mrs. Gregory."

"No," came the answer, with an almost imperceptible change of manner—a change as of gradual petrifaction. "I am not Mrs. Gregory." And with that the lady, who was not Mrs. Gregory, quietly but forcibly closed the door.

It was is if, with the closing of that door, she would have shut Fran out of her life.

CHAPTER II.

A Disturbing Laugh.

A long stretch of wooden sidewalks with here and there a leprous breaking out of granitoid; a succession of dwellings, each in its yard of bluegrass, maple trees, and whitewashed palings, with several residences fine enough to excite wonder—for modest cottages set the architectural pace in the village; a stretch of open country beyond the corporate limits, with a foot bridge to span the deep ravine—and then, at last, a sudden glow in the darkness not caused by the moon, with a circle of stamping and neighing horses encompassing the glow.

The sermon was ended, the exhortation was at the point of loudest voice and most impassioned earnestness. A number of men, most of them young, thronged the footpath leading from the stiles to the tent. A few were smoking; all were waiting for the pretty girls to come forth from the Christian camp. Fran pushed her way among the idlers with admirable nonchalance, her sharp elbow ready for the first resistive pair of ribs.

The crowd outside did not argue a scarcity of seats under the canvas. Fran found a plank without a back, loosely disposed, and entirely unoccupied. She seated herself, straight as an Indian, and with the air of being very much at ease.

The scene was new to her. More than a thousand villagers, ranged along a natural declivity, looked down upon the platform of undressed pine. In front of the platform men and women were kneeling on the ground. Some were bathed in tears; some were praying aloud; some were talking to those who stood, or knelt beside them; some were clasping convulsive hands; all were oblivious of surrounding.

Occasionally one heard above the stentorian voice of the exhorter, above the prayers and exclamations of the "seekers," a sudden shout of exultation—"Bless the Lord!" or a rapturous "A-a-men!" Then a kneeling figure would rise and the exhorter would break off his plea to cry, "Our brother has found the Lord!"

From the hundred members of the choir, Fran singled out the man she had been seeking for so many years. It was easy enough to distinguish him from the singers who crowded the platform, not only by his baton which proclaimed the choir leader, but by his resemblance to the picture she had discovered in a New York Sunday supplement.

Hamilton Gregory was clean-shaved except for a silken reddish mustache; his complexion was fair, his hair a shade between red and brown, his eyes blue. His finely marked face and striking bearing were stamped with distinction and grace.

It was strange to Fran that he did not once glance in her direction. True, there was nothing in her appearance to excite especial attention, but she had looked forward to meeting him ever since she could remember. Now that her eyes were fastened on his face, now that they were so near, sheltered by a common roof, how could he help feeling her presence?

The choir leader rose and lifted his baton. At his back the hundred men and women obeyed the signal, while hymn books fluttered open throughout the congregation. Suddenly the leader of the choir started into galvanic life. He led the song with his sweet voice, his swaying body, his frantic baton, his wild arms, his imperious feet. With all that there was of him, he conducted the melodious charge up the ramparts of sin and indifference. If in repose, Fran had thought him singularly handsome and attractive, she now found him inspiring. His blue eyes burned with exaltation while his magic voice seemed to thrill with more than human ecstasy. The strong, slim, white hand tensely grasping the baton, was the hand of a powerful chieftain wielded in behalf of the God of battles.

One the left, the heavy bass was singing:

"One thing we know,
Wherever we go—
We reap what we sow,
We reap what we sow."

While these words were being doled out at long and impressive intervals, like the tolling of a heavy bell, more than half a hundred soprano voices were hastily getting in their requi-ite number of half notes, thus—

"So scatter little, scatter little, scatter little, scatter little,
Scatter litle seeds of kindness."

In spite of the vast volume of sound produced by these voices, as well as by the accompaniment of two pianos and a snare-drum, the voice of Hamilton Gregory, soaring flute-like toward heaven, seemed to dart through the interstices of "rests," to thread its slender way along infinitesimal crevices of silence. One might have supposed that the booming bass, the eager chattering soprano, the tenor with its thin crust of upper layers, and the throaty fillings of the alto, could have left no vantage points for an obligato. Yet it was Hamilton Gregory's voice that bound all together in divine unity. As one listened, it was the inspired truth as uttered by Hamilton Gregory that brought the message home to conscience. As if one had never before been told that one reaps what one sows, uneasy memory started out of hidden places with its whisper of seed sown amiss. Tears rose to many eyes, and smothered sobs betrayed intense emotion.

Of those who were not in the least affected, Fran was one. She saw and heard Hamilton Gregory's impassioned earnestness, and divined his yearning to touch many hearts; nor did she doubt that he would then and there have given his life to press home upon the erring that they must ultimately reap what they were sowing. Nevertheless she was altogether unmoved. It would have been easier for her to laugh than to cry.

Although the preacher had ceased his exhortations for the singing of the evangelistic hymn, he was by no means at the end of his resources. Standing at the margin of the platform, looking out on the congregation, he slowly moved back and forth his magnetic arms in parallel lines. Without turning his body, it was as if he were cautiously sweeping aside the invisible curtain of doubt that swung between the unsaved and the altar. "This way," he seemed to say. "Follow my hands."

Not one word did he speak. Even between the verses, when he might have striven against the pianos and the snare-drum, he maintained his terrible silence. But as he fixed his ardent eyes upon space, as he moved those impelling arms, a man would rise here, a woman start up there—reluctantly, or eagerly, the unsaved would press their way to the group kneeling at the front. Prayers and groans rose louder. Jubilant shouts of religious victory were more frequent. One could now hardly hear the choir as it insisted—

"We reap what we sow,
We reap what we sow."

Suddenly the evangelist smote his hands together, a signal for song and prayer to cease.

Having obtained a silence that was breathless, he leaned over the edge of the platform, and addressed a man who knelt upon the ground:

"Brother Clinton, can't you get it?"

The man shook his head.

"You've been kneeling there night after night," the evangelist continued; "don't you feel that the Lord loves you? Can't you feel it? Can't you feel it now? Can't you get it? Can't you get it now? Brother Clinton, I want you to get through before these revival services close. They close this night. I go away to-morrow. This may be your last opportunity. I want you to get it now. All these waiting friends want you to get it now. All these praying neighbors want to see you get it. Can't you get through to-night? Just quietly here, without any excitement, without any noise or tumult, just you and your soul alone together—Brother Clinton, can't you get through to-night?"

Brother Clinton shook his head.

Fran laughed aloud.

The evangelist had already turned to Hamilton Gregory as a signal for the hymn to be resumed, for sometimes singing helped them "through," but the sound of irreverent laughter chilled his blood. To his highly wrought emotional nature, that sound of mirth came as the laughter of fiends over the tragedy of an immortal soul.

"Several times," he cried, with whitened face, "these services have been disturbed by the ungodly." He pointed an inflexible finger at Fran: "Yonder sits a little girl who should not have been allowed in this tent unaccompanied by her parents. Brethren! Too much is at stake, at moments like these to shrink from heroic measures. Souls are here, waiting to be saved. Let that little girl be removed. Where are the ushers? I hope she will go without disturbance, but go she shall. Now, Brother Gregory, sing."

The corps of ushers had been sadly depleted by the young men's inclination to bivouac outside, where one could see without being obliged to hear. As the song swept over the worshipers in a wave of pleading, such ushers as still remained, held a brief consultation. The task assigned them did not seem included in their proper functions. Only one could be found to volunteer as policeman, and he only because the evangelist's determined eye and rigid arm had never ceased to indicate the disturbr of the peace.

Fran was furious; her small white face seemed cut in stone as she stared at the evangelist. How could she have known she was going to laugh? Her tumultuous emotions, inspired by the sight of Hamilton Gregory, might well have found expression in some other way. That laugh had been as a darting of tongue-flame directed against the armored Christian soldier whose face was so spiritually beautiful, whose voice was so eloquent.

Fran was suddenly aware of a man pausing irresolutely at the end of the plank that held her erect. Without turning her head, she asked in a rather spiteful voice, "Are you the Sheriff?"

He spoke with conciliatory persuasiveness: "Won't you go with me, little girl?"

Fran turned impatiently to glare at the usher.

He was a fine young fellow of perhaps twenty-four, tall and straight, clean and wholesome. His eyes were sincere and earnest yet they promised much in the way of sunny smiles—at the proper time and place. His mouth was frank, his forehead open, his shoulders broad.

Fran rose as swiftly as if a giant hand had lifted her to her feet. "Come on, then," she said in a tone somewhat smothered. She climbed over the "stringer" at the end of her plank, and marched behind the young man as if oblivious of devouring eyes. The men at the tent entrance scurried out of the way, scattering the shavings and sawdust that lined the path.

As they passed the last pole that supported a gasolene burner, Fran glanced up shyly from under her broad hat. The light burned red upon the young usher's face, and there was something in the crimson glow, or in the face, that made her feel like crying, just because—or so she fancied—it revived the recollection of her loneliness. And as she usually did what she felt like doing, she cried, silently, as she followed the young man out beneath the stars.

CHAPTER III.

On the Foot Bridge.

To the young usher the change of scene was rather bewildering. His eyes were still full of the light from gasoline burners, his ears still rang with the confusion of tent noise into which entered the prolonged monotones of inarticulate groanings, and the explosive suddenness of seemingly irrelevant Amens. Above all, he tingled from the electric atmosphere of intense religious excitement; he was charged with currents at a pressure so high that his nerves were unresponsive to dull details of ordinary life.

Nothing just then mattered except the saving of souls. Having faithfully attended the camp meeting for three weeks he found other interests blotted out. The village as a whole had given itself over to religious ecstasy. Those who had professed their faith left no stone unturned in leading others to the altar, as if life could not resume its routine until the unconverted were brought to kneel at the evangelist's feet.

As Abbott Ashton reflected that, because of the young girl with the mocking laugh, he was losing the climacteric expression of the three weeks' campaign, his displeasure grew. Within him was an undefined thought vibration akin to surprise, caused by the serenity of the hushed sky. Was it not incongruous that the heavens should be so peaceful with their quiet star beacons, while man was exerting himself to the utmost of gesture and noise to glorify the Maker of that calm canopy? From the weather-stained canvas rolled the warming, not unmusically:

"We reap what we sow,
We reap what we sow."

Above the tide of melody, the voice of the evangelist rose in a scream, appalling in its agony—"Oh, men and women, why will you die, why will you die?"

But the stars, looking down at the silent earth, spoke not of death, spoke only as stars, seming to say, "Here are April days, dear old earth, balmy springtime and summer harvest before us!—What merry nights we shall pass together!" The earth answered with a sudden white smile, for the moon had just risen above the distant woods.

At the stile where the foot path from the tent ended, Abbott paused. Why should he go farther? This scoffer, the one false note in the meeting's harmony, had been silenced. "There," he said, showing the road. His tone was final. It meant, "Depart."

Fran spoke in a choking voice, "I'm afraid." It was not until then, that he knew she had been crying, for not once had he looked back. That she should cry, changed everything. And no wonder she was afraid. To the fences on either side of the country road, horses and mules were tethered. Torchlights cast weird shadows. Here and there lounged dimly some fellow preferred the society of side-kicking, shrilly neighing horses to the suing melody of soul-seekers.

"But I must go back to the tent," said the usher softly, not surprised that a little girl should be afraid to venture among these vague terrors.

"I am so little," Fran said plaintively, "and the world is so large."

Abbott stood resolute. To take Fran back to the tent would destroy the influence, but it seemed inhuman to send her away. He temporized rather weakly, "But you came here alone."

"But I'm not going away alone," said Fran. Her voice was still damp, but she had kept her resolution dry.

In the gloom, he vainly sought to discern her features. "Whose little girl are you?" he asked, not without an accent of gentle commiseration.

Fran, one foot on the first step of the stile, looked up at him; the sudden flare of a torch revealed the sorrow in her eyes. "I am nobody's little girl," she answered plaintively.

Her eyes were so large, and so soft and dark, that Abbott was glad she was only a child of fourteen—or fifteen, perhaps. Her face was so strangely eloquent in its yearning for something beyond his comprehension, that he decided then and there to be her friend. The unsteady light prevented definite perception of her face. He noted that her legs were thin, her arms long, her body slight, though there was a faint suggestion of curving outline of hips and bosom that lent an effect of charm.

There was, in truth, an element of charm in all he could discern. Even the thin limbs appealed to him oddly. Possibly the big hat helped to conceal or accentuate—at any rate, the effect was somewhat elfish. As for those great and luminously soft black eyes, he could not for the life of him have said what he saw in them to set his blood tingling with feeling of protecting tenderness. Possibly it was her trust in him, for as he gazed into the earnest eyes of Fran, it was like looking into a clear pool to see oneself.

"Nobody's little girl?" he repeated, inexpressibly touched that it should be so. What a treasure somebody was denied. "Are you a stranger in the town?"

"Never been here before," Fran answered mournfully.

"But why did you come?"

"I came to find Hamilton Gregory."

The young man was astonished. "Didn't you see him in the tent, leading the choir?"

"He has a house in town," Fran said timidly. "I don't want to bother him while he is in his religion. I want to wait for him at his house. Oh," she added earnestly, "if you would only show me the way."

Just is if she did not know the way!

Abbott Ashton was now completely at her mercy. "So you know Brother Gregory, do you?" he asked, as he led her over the stiles and down the wagon road.

"Never saw him in my life." Fran replied casually. She knew how to say it prohibitively, but she purposely left the bars down, to find out if the young man was what she hoped.

And he was. He did not ask a question. They sought the grass-grown path bordering the dusty road; as they ascended the hill that shut out a view of the village, to their ears came the sprightly, twentieth century hymn. What change had come over Ashton that the song now seemed as strangely out of keeping as had the peacefulness of the April night, when he first left the tent? He felt the prick of remorse because in the midst of nature, he had so soon forgotten about souls.

Fran caught the air and softly sang: "We reap what we sow——"

"Don't! he reproved her. "Child, that means nothing to you."

"Yes, it does, too," she returned, rather impudently. She continued to sing and hum until the last note was smothered in her little nose. Then she spoke: "However—it means a different thing to me from what it means to the choir."

He looked at her curiously. "How different?" he smiled.

"To me, it means that we really do reap what we sow, and that if we've done something very wrong in the past—ugh! Better look out—trouble's coming. That's what the song means to me."

"And will you kindly tell me what it means to the choir?"

"Yes, I'll tell you what it means to the choir: It means sitting on benches and singing, after a sermon; and it means a tent, and a great evangelist and a celebrated soloist—and then going home to act as if it wasn't so."

Abbott was not only astonished, but pained. Suddenly he had lost "Nobody's little girl," to be confronted by an elfish spirit of mischief. He asked with constraint. "Did this critical attitude make you laugh out, in the tent?"

"I wouldn't tell you why I laughed," Fran declared, "for a thousand dollars. And I've seen more than that in my day."

They walked on. He was silent, she impenetrable. At last she said, in a changed voice, "My name's Fran. What's yours?"

He laughed boyishly. "Mine's Abbott."

His manner made her laugh sympathetically. It was just the manner she liked best—gay, frank, and a little mischievous. "Abbott?" she repeated; "well—is that all?"

"Ashton is the balance; Abbott Ashton. And yours?"

"The rest of mine is Nonpareil—funny name, isn't it?—Fran Nonpareil. It means Fran, the small type; or Fran who's unlike everybody else; or—Oh, there are lots of meanings to me. Some find one, some another, some never understand."

It was because Abbott Ashton was touched, that he spoke lightly:

"What a very young Nonpariel to be wandering about the world, all by yourself!"

She was grateful for his raillery. "How young do you think?"

"Let me see. Hum! You are only—about——" She laughed mirthfully at his air of preposterous wisdom. "About thirteen—fourteen, yes, you are more than fi-i-ifteen, more than * * *. But take off that enormous hat, little Nonpareil. There's no use guessing in the dark when the moon's shining."

Fran was gleeful. "All right," she cried in one of her childish tones, shill, fresh, vibratory with the music of innocence.

By this time they had reached the foot bridge that spanned the deep ravine. Here the wagon road made its crossing of a tiny stream, by slipping under the foot bridge, some fifteen feet below. Down there, all was semi-gloom, pungent fragrance of weeds, cooling breath of the half-dried brook, mystery of space between steep banks. But on a level with the bridge, meadow lands sloped away from the ravine on either hand. On the left lay straggling Littleburg with its four or five hundred houses, faintly twinkling, and beyond the meadows on the right, a fringe of woods started up as if it did not belong there, but had come to be seen, while above the woods swung the big moon with Fran on the foot bridge to shine for.

Fran's hat dangled idly in her hand as she drew herself with backward movement upon the railing. The moonlight was full upon her face; so was the young man's gaze. One of her feet found, after leisurely exploration, a down slanting board upon the edge of which she pressed her heel for support. The other foot swayed to and fro above the flooring, while a little hand on either side of her gripped the top rail.

"Here I am," she said, shaking back rebellious hair.

Abbott Ashton studied her with grave deliberation—it is doubtful if he had ever before so thoroughly enjoyed his duties as usher. He pronounced judicially, "You are older than you look."

"Yes," Fran explained, "my experience accounts for that. I've had lots."

Abbott's lingering here beneath the moon when he should have been hurrying back to the tent, showed how unequally the good things of life—experience, for instance—are divided. "You are sixteen," he hazarded, conscious of a strange exhilaration.

Fran dodged the issue behind a smile—"And I don't think you are so awfully old."

Abbott was brought to himself with a jolt that threw him hard upon self-consciousness. "I am superintendent of the public school." The very sound of the words rang as a warning, and he became preternaturally solemn.

"Goodness!" cried Fran, considering his grave mouth and thoughtful eyes, "does it hurt that bad?"

Abbott smiled. All the same, the position of superintendent must not be bartered away for the transitory pleasures of a foot bridge. "We had better hurry, if you please," he said gravely.

"I am so afraid of you," murmured Fran. "But I know the meeting will last a long time yet. I'd hate to have to wait long at Mr. Gregory's with that disagreeable lady who isn't Mrs. Gregory."

Abbott was startled. Why did she thus designate Mr. Gregory's secretary? He looked keenly at Fran, but she only said plaintively:

"Can't we stay here?"

He was disturbed and perplexed. It was as if a flitting shadow from some unformed cloud of thought-mist had fallen upon the every-day world out of his subconsciousness. Why did this stranger speak of Miss Grace Noir as the "lady who isn't Mrs. Gregory?" The young man at times had caught himself thinking of her in just that way.

Looking intently at the other as if to divine her secret thoughts, he forgot momentarily his uneasiness. One could not long be troubled by thought-mists from subconsciousness, when looking at Fran, for Fran was a fact. He sighed involuntarily. She was such a fact!

Perhaps she wasn't really pretty—but homely? by no means. Her thin face slanted to a sharpened chin. Her hair, drawn to the corner of either eye, left a white triangle whose apex pointed to the highest reach of the forehead. Thus the face, in all its contour, was rising, or faling, to a point. This sharpness of feature was in her very laugh itself; while in that hair-encircled oval was the light of elfish mockery, but of no human joy.

School superintendents do not enjoy being mystified. "Really," Abbott declared abruptly, "I must go back to the meeting."

Fran had heard enough about his leaving her. She decided to stop that once and for all. "If you go back, I go too!" she said conclusively. She gave him a look to show that she meant it, then became all humility.

"Please don't be cross with little Nonpareil," she coaxed. "Please don't want to go back to that meeting. Please don't want to leave me. You are so learned and old and so strong—you don't care why a little girl laughs."

Fran tilted her head sidewise, and the glance of her eyes proved irresistible. "But tell me about Mr. Gregory," she pleaded, "and don't mind my ways. Ever since mother died, I've found nothing in this world but love that was for somebody else, and trouble that was for me."

The pathetic cadence of the slender-throated tones moved Abbott more than he cared to show.

"If you're in trouble," he exclaimed, "you've sought the right helper in Mr. Gregory. He's the richest man in the county, yet lives so simply, so frugally—they keep few servants—and all because he wants to do good with his money."

"I guess his secretary is considerable help to him," Fran observed.

"I don't know how he'd carry on his great work without her. I think Mr. Gregory is one of the best men that ever lived."

Fran asked with simplicity, "Great church worker?"

"He's as good as he is rich. He never misses a service. I can't give the time to it that he does—to the church, I mean; I have the ambition to hold, one day, a chair at Yale or Harvard—that means to teach in a university——" he broke off, in explanation.

Fran held out her swinging foot, and examined the dusty shoe. "Oh," she said in a relieved tone, "I was afraid it meant to sit down all the time. Lots of people are ambitious not to move if they can help it."

He looked at her a little uncertainly, then went on: "So it keeps me studying hard, to fit myself for the future. I hope to be re-elected superintendent in Littleburg again next year—this is my first term—there is so much time to study, in Littleburg. After next year, I'll try for something bigger; just keep working my way up and up——"

He had not meant to tell her about himself, but Fran's manner of lifting her head to look at him as he finished each phrase, had beguiled him to the next. The applause in her eyes warmed his heart.

"You see," said Abbott with a deprecatory smile, "I want to make myself felt in the world."

Fran's eyes shone with an unspoken "Hurrah!" and as he met her gaze, he felt a thrill of pleasure from the impression that he was what she wanted him to be.

Fran allowed his soul to bathe a while in divine eye-beams of flattering approval, then gave him a little sting to bring him to life. "You are pretty old, not to be married," she remarked. "I hope you won't find some woman to put an end to your high intentions, but men generally do. Men fall in love, and when they finally pull themselves out, they've lost sight of the shore they were headed for."

A slight color stole to Abbott's face. In fact, he was rather hard hit. This wandering child was no doubt a witch. He looked in the direction of the tent, as if to escape the weaving of her magic. But he only said, "That sounds—er—practical."

"Yes," said Fran, wondering who "the woman" was, "if you can't be practical, there's no use to be. Well, I can see you now, at the head of some university—you'll make it, because you're so much like me. Why, when they first began teaching me to feed—Good gracious! What am I talking about?" She hurried on, as if to cover her confusion. "But I haven't got as far in books as you have, so I'm not religious."

"Books aren't religion," he remonstrated, then added with unnecessary gentleness, "Little Nonpareil! What an idea!"

"Yes, books are," retorted Fran, shaking back her hair, swinging her foot, and twisting her body impatiently. That's the only kind of religion I know anything about—just books, just doctrines; what you ought to believe and how you ought to act—all nicely printed and bound between covers. Did you ever meet any religion outside of a book, moving up and down, going about in the open?"

He answered in perfect confidence, "Mr. Gregory lives his religion daily—the kind that helps people, that makes the unfortunate happy."

Fran was not hopeful. "Well, I've come all the way from New York to see him. I hope he can make me happy. I'm certainly unfortunate enough. I've got all the elements he needs to work on."

"From New York!" He considered the delicate form, the youthful face, and whistled. "Will you please tell me where your home is, Nonpareil?"

She waved her arm inclusively. "America. I wish it were concentrated in some spot, but it's just spread out thin under the Stars and Stripes. My country's about all I have." She broke off with a catch in her voice—she tried to laugh, but it was no use.

The high moon which had been obscured by gathering cloud banks, found an opening high above the fringe of woods, and cast a shining glow upon her face, and touched her figure as with silver braid. Out of this light looked Fran's eyes as dark as deepest shadows, and out of the unfathomable depths of her eyes glided two tears as pure as their source in her heart.

Suddenly it came to Abbott Ashton that he understood the language of moon, watching woods, meadowlands, even the gathering rain cloud; all spoke of the universal brotherhood of man with nature; a brotherhood including the most ambitious superintendent of schools and a homeless Nonpareil; a brotherhood to be confirmed by the clasping of sincere hands. There was danger in such a confirmation, for it carried Abbott beyond the limits that mark a superintendent's confines.

As he stood on the bridge, holding Fran's hand in a warm and sympathetic pressure, he was not unlike one on picket service who slips over the trenches to hold friendly parley with the enemy. Abbott did not know there was any danger in this brotherly handclasp; but that was because he could not see a fleshy and elderly lady slowly coming down the hill. As superintendent, he should doubtless have considered his responsibilities to the public; he did consider them when the lady, breathless and severe, approached the bridge, while every pound of her ample form cast its weight upon the seal of her disapproving, low-voiced, and significant, "Good evening, Prof. Ashton."

Fran whistled.

The lady heard, but she swept on without once glancing back. There was in her none of that saline tendency that made of Lot a widower; the lady desired to see no more.

Fran opened her eyes at Abbott to their widest extent, as she demurely asked, "How cold is it? My thermometer is frozen."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT SUNDAY.

SCOOP THE CUB REPORTER — Why Did the City Editor Leave So Suddenly? — By "HOP"